

CHAPTER 7

SECTION 12 COMMUNICABLE DISEASES OF PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERN

7.12.1 PURPOSE

This section provides guidelines for the CDSHO, and supervisory personnel, who must address concerns associated with employees that are diagnosed with a communicable disease of human public health concern.

7.12.2 GENERAL

A large number of communicable diseases exist in humans that can be transmitted in the workplace setting. These diseases will vary in degree of gravity from the common cold to bubonic plague. The mere mentioning of some diseases of public health concern possibly being in the workplace can create situations which approach panic. This section will only address diseases which are required to be reported to, and contact investigations performed by local, State, or Federal public health agencies. Sexually transmitted diseases **will not** be covered or addressed by this section.

7.12.3 POLICY

In the event that an employee has a disease which may be of concern to coworkers, either through exposure from direct contact with the infected employee, or due to underlying medical conditions which may have weakened their ability to ward off illness, confirmation of the employee's disease must be obtained.

It is best if the information is obtained from the employee directly. This will allow the CDSHO or supervisor to clearly understand the nature of the disease. Additionally, the employee may state what information, if any, is to be shared with coworkers. If the employee is not capable of providing information, his/her physician should be contacted for guidance.

If it is necessary to brief employees on the disease, and to gather information on which coworkers may have been in direct contact with the employee, this function is best left to public health authorities. You must contact them for guidance and information; the public health authorities may be aware of the employee's disease and could offer guidance on what further steps, if any, are warranted. Your assistance may be requested, and your cooperation is encouraged.

It is imperative that your actions not compromise the employee's right to privacy. When asked for specifics on the employee's state of health, you must not divulge any information that you do not have permission from the employee, or their physician, to release. Only public health officials will have the authority to release more specific information in lieu of having permission from the employee. General information on the disease can be shared, as this is readily available, but it should be stressed that the symptoms, and outcome of a disease, will vary greatly with the individual. It is possible that public health officials can provide informational sessions to concerned coworkers, and should be requested to do so as the individual case warrants.

The primary role of the CDSHO or supervisor in these instances, is to educate the coworkers of the infected employee in order to quell fears and idle gossip, which may be more harmful to the work

environment than any disease organism.